

**DEER PROGRESS REPORT
JULY 2011
SANDY RITCHIE**

It has been a few months since my last deer progress report as we transitioned from deer wintering area aerial surveys into spring and summer deer-related projects so I thought it an opportune time to provide you with an update. John Pratte, Wildlife Management Section Supervisor provided input to this report.

1. Winter 2011 Deer Wintering Area (DWA) Aerial Survey Summary

MDIFW has long recognized the importance of deer wintering habitat to deer survival in Maine and, depending on aircraft availability and favorable conditions, regards winter DWA aerial and ground surveys as a high priority of Wildlife Division biologists. Biologists and game wardens have been documenting the location of deer wintering areas since the 1950's. In *Maine's Game Plan for Deer* the Department indicated it would intensify its efforts and resources to document areas of active winter deer use, and staff responded in a number of ways producing excellent results.

A number of variables impact the amount of aerial surveys staff can complete in any given winter including: funding, aircraft availability, staff availability, snow depth, time since last snowfall, light conditions, wind, equipment failure, shutdown days, etc. During the 2011 winter, Warden Service pilots made flying DWA surveys a priority and also coordinated survey efforts with Department of Conservation pilots. The Department of Marine Resources was on board to help as well but their airplane was down for repairs most of the winter and was unavailable. Next, staff worked to prioritize flight schedules based on the time lapse since an area was last flown and the willingness of landowners to cooperatively manage DWAs. Now we just needed the right weather conditions to take to the air.

It is difficult to identify an "average" winter for flying; however, if you look at our efforts over the last decade or so you would find that on average we fly about 47 towns per year surveying DWAs. As a result of a coordinated effort among many and some favorable conditions, we achieved a combined 24.5 "flight days" allowing us to survey DWAs in 90 towns - a 91% increase over an "average" winter! This represents a significant effort and will be very useful as we continue reaching out to landowners and develop additional cooperative DWA management efforts.

Critical to the success of this effort was Game Warden Pilot Daryl Gordon who tragically died in a plane crash on March 24th. Wildlife biologists spent many hours in the air with Pilot Gordon; he will be dearly missed.

2. DWA Mapping Project with James W. Sewall Company

The Department has contracted with James W. Sewall Company to digitize deer wintering areas in Regions C, E, F, and G. Sewall has worked with MDIFW regards DWA mapping in the past. This project was made possible by a grant from the Maine Outdoor Heritage Fund and once completed will

be important in informing cooperative DWA management efforts with landowners.

3. **Deer / Vehicle Collision Sign Protocol**

MDIFW is working with the Maine Department of Transportation (MDOT) to develop a protocol within and between the two agencies for the deployment and maintenance of signs where wintering deer are chronically involved in vehicle collisions. Regional Wildlife Biologist Chuck Hulsey is coordinating development of the protocol, which is currently undergoing internal review and will be available soon.

4. **Legislation, Resolves, and Working Groups**

- a. **Increased Penalties for Illegally Killing Deer** - As a result of action in the 125th Maine Legislature, penalties were established for persons who hunt antlerless deer in wildlife management districts where no permits were issued. Violators face a Class D misdemeanor with a minimum fine of \$1,000 and three days in jail.
- b. **Deer Predation Advisory Group** - As a result of Public Law, Chapter 381, LD 1569 An Act to Restore the White-tailed Deer Population and Improve Maine's Wildlife Economy and Heritage, the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife established a Deer Predation Advisory Group to assist with developing and implementing a program to control predation on deer. LD 1569, Section 7 speaks to "predator control and deer protection on public lands"; additional language in Section 10 is provided below.

Sec. 10. Predator control. If funding is available, the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife shall develop and implement a program to control predation on deer that includes, but is not limited to:

- 1. Organization of an advisory group of professional guides and trappers to help develop and implement the program;*
- 2. Utilization of both hunters and trappers for the program;*
- 3. Utilization of animal damage control techniques and agents trained in animal damage control techniques; and*
- 4. Increases in the funding of animal damage control efforts related to the program.*

The department shall report its progress on developing and implementing the program to the Joint Standing Committee on Inland Fisheries and Wildlife no later than February 1, 2012.

Persons invited to participate on the Deer Predation Advisory Group include:

Gerry Lavigne

Sportsman's Alliance of Maine

Don Dudley	Hunter, trapper, Maine guide
Jerry McLaughlin	President, Aroostook County Conservation Association
Dan Wagner	President, Maine Trappers Association
Skip Trask	Maine Professional Guides Association
Sgt. David Craven	Maine Warden Service

Shawn Haskell, MDIFW Wildlife Resource Assessment Section Supervisor is chairing the advisory group, and John Pratte (MDIFW Management Section Supervisor), Lee Kantar (MDIFW Deer and Moose Biologist), and John DePue (MDIFW Furbearer Biologist) are available to provide technical assistance.

The first meeting of the Deer Predation Advisory Group was held on July 14th; a second meeting is planned for August 11. The Department must report its progress on developing and implementing a program to the Joint Standing Committee on Inland Fisheries and Wildlife by February 1, 2012.

- c. **Deer Winter Feeding Strategy** - As a result of Resolve Chapter 20 LD 271 Resolve, to Direct the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife to Prepare a Deer Winter Feeding Strategy, MDIFW is convening a group of stakeholders to prepare a comprehensive deer winter feeding strategy, including a public outreach component. In particular, the group will be looking at winter feeding programs that result in deer road mortality. The Department must report findings, recommendations, and any proposed legislation to the Joint Standing Committee on Inland Fisheries and Wildlife by January 5, 2012.
- d. **Scents Used in Deer Hunting and Renderings Used in Deer Feed** - Additional legislation (Resolve Chapter 36, LD 445) directs MDIFW to study the sale of deer scent lures containing cervid urine and the sale of deer feed containing animal renderings and the implications that the sale and use of these products have for the spread of chronic wasting disease, a fatal disease of the nervous system in deer and moose. The Department shall report its findings, including any suggested legislation, to the Joint Standing Committee on Inland Fisheries and Wildlife no later than December 7, 2011.
- e. **Predator Control and Deer Habitat Fund** - Public Law, Chapter 381, LD 1569 also established the Predator Control and Deer Habitat Fund within MDIFW as a nonlapsing fund to be used by the Commissioner to fund or assist in funding predator control and to enhance deer habitat. The Department will establish a system of checkoff options on its online licensing system that allow a person to donate money to be deposited in the fund and used for purposes indicated by the checkoffs.

- f. **DWAs an LMF Priority** - Legislation (Public Law, Chapter 381, LD 1569) now requires that for acquisitions funded by the Land for Maine's Future Fund, the board shall give priority to conserve and protect deer wintering areas in addition to projects that conserve lands with multiple outstanding resource or recreational value or a single exceptional value.
 - g. **Maine's Game Plan for Deer** - The Department will expand *Maine's Game Plan for Deer* to the entire state and submit the plan to the Joint Standing Committee on Inland Fisheries and Wildlife no later than February 1, 2012.
 - h. **Annual Reports and Other Efforts** - The Department will be reporting annually to the Joint Standing Committee on Inland Fisheries and Wildlife on a number of deer-related issues, including but not limited to: deer population goals and 5-year benchmarks, funding needed to meet goals and the progress toward meeting goals, deer mortality, DWA aerial survey efforts, and efforts to secure revenue to enhance the Department's deer rebuilding efforts. In addition MDIFW, with the assistance of sporting groups, will continue efforts to restructure and increase the budget of the department's Division of Public Information and Education and to continue an ongoing relationship with the State's deer hunters using surveys, newsletters and the department's publicly accessible website to keep hunters current and involved in the implementation of the department's *Maine Game Plan for Deer*. The Department will report to the Joint Standing Committee on Inland Fisheries and Wildlife no later than February 1, 2012.
5. **Department Online Magazine** - The May 2011 issue of the Department's online magazine is dedicated to deer and efforts to increase the population in northern, eastern, and western Maine. You can read it at <http://www.maine.gov/ifw/magazine/index.htm>.
6. **2010 CWD Samples All Negative** - For more than 10 years, the Departments of Agriculture USDA-Wildlife Services and Inland Fisheries and Wildlife have monitored for Chronic Wasting Disease – a fatal disease of the nervous system of deer – and worked to prevent its introduction. MDIFW submitted 717 samples from deer (and 1 moose) for CWD in 2010. All samples were negative (not detected).
7. **Grant Award for Landowner Outreach** - MDIFW has been awarded a grant through NRCS (USDA Natural Resources Conservation Services) via their Wildlife Habitat and Environmental Quality Incentives Program (WHIP and EQUIP). This grant will help fund a position for a 16-month period dedicated to landowner outreach regarding DWA habitat restoration. As mentioned in previous deer progress reports, we have been working closely with NRCS over the last 18 months to improve our efforts reaching out to small landowners specifically for DWA management. Regional Wildlife Biologist Rich Hoppe has done a great job working with their offices in Aroostook County to pilot this effort which was instrumental to NRCS offering this

opportunity to expand those efforts. This is a great example of successful partnering and will enhance our ongoing efforts to increase our deer herd.

8. **Future Deer Progress Reports** – Unless otherwise warranted, I hope to provide additional updates prior to the fall hunting seasons (late October-early November) and in advance of winter aerial and ground surveys (late December-early January) and monthly updates during the winter 2012.